

CITY OF JERSEY CITY

JERRAMIAH T. HEALY
MAYOR



CITY HALL
JERSEY CITY, NJ 07302
TEL: (201) 547-5200
FAX: (201) 547-4288

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2013

Contact: Jennifer Morrill
Press Secretary
201-547-4836
201-376-0699

City Of Jersey City Launches Aggressive Vacant Buildings Security Protocol HUD Style Board Ups & Fire Department Signage to Improve Public Safety & Quality of Life

JERSEY CITY – Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy, and Fire Department and Housing Code officials, will hold a **10 a.m. press conference** on **Wednesday, April 24, 2013**, at **22 Jewett Avenue**, to announce new security protocols for vacant buildings and the updated Fire Department Vacant Building Marking System as part of the City's ongoing and aggressive campaign targeted at vacant and abandoned buildings throughout the city.

Any vacant or abandoned building that is to be unoccupied for a period of six months or longer will now be required by the City of Jersey City to adhere to new board up guidelines established by the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**. Currently, many vacant or abandoned buildings are left either unsecured or boarded in a haphazard way, which creates public safety concerns, as well as quality of life issues.

“Abandoned and distressed properties not only lower home values and drain equity of nearby homes, but they also create real and potentially serious public safety concerns,” said **Mayor Healy**. “We have seen fires start in vacant buildings and drug activity occur, and by ensuring these properties are properly secured, we can reduce this type of dangerous activity and also improve the quality of life of the neighborhood.”

Police officers, housing inspectors, and other city officials will be attendance at the press conference to answer questions about abandoned buildings and the new policies.

(more)

(2)

The new, HUD-style board up requirements call for plywood that fits snugly in the window with no blind spots and must be a 2 x 4 attached to 5/8 exterior plywood with common nails and appropriate screws. Additionally, exterior wood will also be required to be painted white or beige.

Beginning next week, property owners – including banks and mortgage service companies – will be receiving a directive from the Public Officer to have their contractor HUD- style secure their properties. A deadline will be given and further action will be taken if necessary, meaning the city will facilitate the board up and place a lien on the property for the cost.

The Jersey City Fire Department has also updated its Vacant Building Marking System, with placards for vacant and abandoned buildings that indicate if there is a hole in the floor, an open roof, fire escapes damaged, stairs or landing missing or if conditions are so severe that NO ENTRY is permitted.

“We want our public safety personnel, our police officers, firefighters, and EMTs, to be safe when entering a building and the new signage provided by the Fire Department will ensure that they know of any dangerous conditions prior to entry,” said **Mayor Healy**. “We have had firefighters and police suffer injuries before, and we believe this new system will help keep our first responders safe when doing their jobs.”

In addition to the new building placards, the Fire Department has also implemented a new referral procedure on unsecured properties. The Police Department also regularly receives a list of abandoned or vacant properties and sends community relations officers to patrol those buildings and report any issues.

The City annually issues hundreds of summonses for vacant properties due to unsecured structures, weeds, and debris, and the Mayor's Quality Of Life Task Force coordinates with United Water, and PSE&G, JCPD, and JCFD, to make sure these buildings are safe and utilities are disconnected. Now the vacant buildings will be secured once, with a HUD-style proper securing, eliminating the need to re-secure down the road. Any building that is deemed a “imminent hazard” by the Construction Code Official can be demolished immediately.

Additionally, the City has also hired **Gluck Walrath LLP** for legal services relating to the acquisition of targeted abandoned properties that have been published as part of the City’s abandoned properties list. The City would then rehabilitate those properties and return them to the tax rolls, so they are no longer a nuisance to the community.

When originally published, the **Abandoned Property List** included 56 properties. Due to aggressive enforcement, that number now stands at 37. The properties removed from the list have met or satisfied Housing Code Enforcement or were renovated and currently occupied.

(more)

(3)

In an effort to reduce the number of vacant and/or abandoned properties, property owners are contacted to arrange an inspection and are then given an opportunity to renovate or turn the property over for demolition. If the property owners fail to respond to the notices, their properties enter into the eminent domain process.

Additionally, in Dec 2011, the Mayor unveiled the **Vacant Building Registry** as part of the Division of Housing Code Enforcement's continued crack-down on the most negligent property owners. Since then, Housing Code has **registered 892 vacant buildings**, which has generated a total of \$297,000 in registration fees. Additionally, in 2012, the City collected more than \$100,000 in fines and violations from code enforcement of vacant buildings.

Abandoned or vacant properties will be obtained by negotiated purchase or spot blight/eminent domain. These actions are permissible under the Abandoned Properties Rehabilitation Act, N.J.S.A. 55:19-78 et. Seq. (APRA). This will allow the City to acquire the properties and arrange to have them rehabilitated. It will result in the removal of blight and it will assist with stabilizing neighborhoods.

The law defines "abandoned property" as any property that has not been legally occupied for six (6) months, and which also meets any one of the following criteria; (a) the property is in need of rehabilitation, and no rehabilitation has taken place for six (6) months; (b) construction was initiated and then discontinued prior to completion, and no construction has taken place for six (6) months; (c) the property is in property tax arrears by at least one installment; or (d) the property is determined to be a nuisance by the public officer.

"Jersey City has been one of the most aggressive municipalities in New Jersey and is at the forefront on tackling the vacant property issues due partly to the sub-prime mortgage collapse," said **Mayor Healy**. "The abandoned property ordinance and the vacant building registration ordinance have provided us the tools to combat this quality of life issue which affects neighborhoods throughout the city."

The new vacant property ordinance signed by Mayor Healy has increased the enforcement and issuing of violations to property owners due to the neglect of their vacant properties.

All media inquiries should be directed to Jennifer Morrill, Press Secretary to Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy at 201-547-4836 or 201-376-0699.///